

St. George's Society 2

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THE ST. GEORGE'S SOCIETY AND
MR. GOLDWIN SMITH.

I AM far from desiring to renew the public controversy respecting the attempt to expel me, on account of my political opinions, from the St. George's Society. But as allusions have continued to be made to the affair, and it remains on record in the Minutes of the Society, I have thought it well to commit the facts to writing for my future vindication in case of need. I place copies of the memorandum privately in the hands of a few friends, especially of those members of the St. George's Society who came forward in my defence, and who may be glad to be assured that in taking that course they did the Society no wrong. My absence from Toronto when the attack was made prevented a full and fair statement of the case at the time.

The St. George's Society of Toronto is declared by its charter to be formed for the benevolent purposes of "affording pecuniary, medical, and other relief to persons of English or Welsh birth, and their descendants, as may from sickness or other causes have fallen into distress." By one of the By-Laws the "promotion of mutual and friendly intercourse" is added to the objects of the Society. But

even if this addition affected the present question, no By-Law could alter the charter.

By the twenty-third By-Law "the introduction of political or religious subjects, or their discussion, shall not be allowed by the Society."

On the 6th of June, 1879, I was elected a Life Member of the Society.

In the previous year I had published in Canada a book entitled "The Political Destiny of Canada," advocating the Union of Canada and the United States. The book had been reviewed or noticed in many quarters, had formed the subject of a series of criticisms by Sir Francis Hincks, and had made my opinions generally known.

Thus I was admitted, and my donations were received, with a full knowledge of my political opinions, and under the pledge implied in the By-Law excluding politics from discussion.

On the 8th of July, 1881, a motion was brought forward in my absence to elect me an honorary member of the Society. An adverse resolution was moved at a subsequent meeting, partly on the ground that "the peculiar views as to the future relations of Canada to the rest of the empire and to the United States, with which Mr. Smith has become so prominently identified, would afford ground for the assumption that by this honorary distinction those views are approved by the Society." The resolution was ruled out of order by the President under the By-Law precluding the discussion of political opinion. After this I continued my donations till they amounted in all to upwards of a thousand dollars, and was elected an officer of the Society.

On the first of February, 1889, I was brought forward,

not at my own instance, for the Presidency of the Society, but was defeated by Mr. W. E. Wellington.

Failure to be elected to an office which I had not sought, caused me no concern ; but the spirit in which the contest had been conducted, and the attacks made upon my character, showed me that politics of a very bitter and personal kind had found their way into a society which I had joined on the supposition that it was purely benevolent, or benevolent and social, and that politics were excluded from its pale. I could have no wish to continue such associations, least of all in a charitable institution. I therefore practically retired from the Society, only refraining from the formal resignation of my Life Membership because I had no wish to do anything hostile or give rise to anything unpleasant.

In the year 1892, owing principally to the pressure of the American Tariff, there was a movement in the Provinces of Ontario and Quebec in favour of union with the United States. I took no part in setting that movement on foot. I was not in Canada at its inception, or before it had come to a head. But a Continental Union Association having been formed, or rather revived, I joined it, contributed to its fund, and allowed myself to be named its Honorary President. I declined the Presidency, and would gladly have declined the Honorary Presidency, because I had, in fact, shut my study door on all political agitations, and devoted the small remainder of my days to the completion of literary works. But, having advocated Continental Union, and possibly induced others to embrace it, I felt that it would be cowardly to hold back, especially when an attempt had been made to repress freedom of discussion on the subject by the dismissal of Mr. Elgin Myers from his office.

The question was distinctly put to Sir John Thompson, Minister of Justice, in Parliament, by Mr. Choquette, whether Continental Union, or, as they termed it, Annexation, was a lawful opinion, and the Minister of Justice answered that it was, provided the means were lawful.* The means employed by the Continental Union Association were strictly lawful. Its declared object was to "obtain, with the leave of the Imperial Government, the submission of the question to the Canadian people, and to prepare the people for the vote." The consent of the Imperial Government was most distinctly recognized as indispensable.

I had not the slightest personal interest in the matter of any kind. Whether my course was right or wrong, I was actuated solely by the conviction which I had long entertained, and which I shared with public men in England, whose patriotism as well as their loyalty was unquestioned, that the re-union of the English-speaking race on this continent would be beneficial to both branches of the race, especially to the Canadian branch, and that it would be not less advantageous to the mother country.

In January, 1893, I spoke at a meeting of the Continental Union Association, and intimated that I was on the point of leaving Toronto on my annual health trip to the South. No sooner had my back been turned than Mr. Castell Hopkins, as a member of the St. George's Society,

* "Mr. Choquette—Would a speech favouring annexation be seditious?"

"Sir John Thompson--Not if the person thought that the Constitution should be changed by lawful means."—*Debates of the House of Commons of the Dominion of Canada*, (May 19, 1892,) Vol. xxxv, col. 2833.

put up the following motion, which was seconded by Mr. Charles Spanner, senior :—

“ That in view of his advocacy of the annexation of the Dominion of Canada to the United States, his position as President of the Continental Union Association of Toronto, and the treason to his Sovereign, to England, and to Canada, involved in these conditions, this body of loyal Englishmen request Mr. Goldwin Smith to tender his resignation as a Life Member of the St. George’s Society, and hereby instruct the Treasurer to return to Mr. Smith the fee previously paid for that privilege.”

The last clause was afterwards omitted by Mr. Hopkins, who may have seen in the *Globe* newspaper that what he would have to return, if pecuniary right was to be done, was not an ordinary fee of \$10, but the sum of \$1,060.

Mr. Castell Hopkins was a member of the editorial staff of the *Empire*, a journal which had long been assailing me with much virulence, and had ended by attempting to fix upon me, in relation to this very question, the same charge of treason. That charge it supported by a document which, it pretended, had been stolen for it from the printing office of Messrs. Hunter & Rose, but which I proved incontestably to be a fabrication.

Mr. Castell Hopkins, at the time when he gave notice of his motion, was disqualified from so doing, as he had not paid his subscription. This seems to indicate that he can have felt no extraordinary interest in the Society and that it was probably not by his zeal and anxiety for its character that he was led to take action against me when its leading members took none.

On the third of March, 1893, Mr. Castell Hopkins’s motion came up. His notice was held bad on the ground

above mentioned. But the President, Mr. Drayton, authorized him to bring forward his motion without any notice. The twenty-fifth By-Law of the Society provides that no proposition for the expulsion of a member shall be in order "unless one month's notice has been given in writing of an intention to submit it at the next ensuing general meeting." It is obvious that Mr. Castell Hopkins's motion was, though not in form, in substance a motion for expulsion, involving an infamous charge and formulated in the most insulting language which political and personal malice could suggest. Yet Mr. Drayton allowed him to bring it forward without notice, and in the absence from the country of the member against whom it was directed. Mr. Drayton also ruled, in direct contradiction to the ruling of his predecessor above cited, that the question of political union with the United States was not political, and that the By-Law which excluded politics from discussion was applicable only to orthodox politics; a construction which, it is presumed, he would have extended by analogy to the other prohibited subject, that of religion.

Mr. Herbert Mason moved, and Mr. Wood seconded, an amendment to the effect that the political opinions of a member could not be introduced.

After a long and angry debate, Mr. Castell Hopkins and his party, seeing that they could not carry their motion, acquiesced in the following amendment, which was adopted without division:—

"Whereas it has been brought to the notice of this Society that Mr. Goldwin Smith, one of its Life Members, has openly proclaimed himself in favour of severing Canada from the rest of the British Empire, and has also accepted the office of Honorary President of an associa-

“ tion having for its object the active promotion of an agitation for the union of Canada with the United States,

“ Therefore the Society desires emphatically to place on record its strong disapprobation of any such movement, and hereby expresses its extreme regret that the Society should contain in its ranks a member who is striving for an object which would cause an irreparable injury to this Dominion, would entail a loss to the mother land of a most important part of her empire, and would deprive Canadians of their birth-right as British subjects.”

I thereupon addressed the following letter to the President of the Society :—

“ To the President of the St. George’s Society :—

“ SIR,—By the report of your meeting on Friday last, I see that while the attack which Mr. Castell Hopkins was allowed, in my absence, to make on my character has fallen to the ground, a resolution was passed pointed at me and condemnatory of the political opinions which, in common with many Canadian citizens, I hold. The object of the Continental Union Association, to my connection with which exception is taken, is ‘ to procure by constitutional means, and with the consent of the Crown, the submission of the question of Continental Union to the Canadian people.’ If this is treason, let the law be put in force against it; unless it is treason, let the characters of honourable citizens remain unassailed by reckless imputation. Independence, to which many, including the Premier of our Province, look forward, would be not less than Continental Union, the severance of Canada from allegiance to the British Crown.

“ The twenty-third By-law of the Society is ‘ The introduction of political or religious subjects, or their discussion shall not be allowed at any meeting of the Society.’ The proceedings of Friday night appear to have been in direct contravention of this rule. To pre-

"tend that in the phrase 'political or religious subjects,'
 "the word 'political' is to be taken, not like 'religious,'
 "in its natural sense, and that which it bears in all the
 "dictionaries, but in some non-natural and restricted
 "sense, such as would admit the introduction of the most
 "burning of all political subjects, is, it seems to me, a
 "subterfuge which no upright judge could allow to prevail.

"The Act of Incorporation, which must be decisive as
 "to the objects of the Society, describes it as 'formed
 "for the benevolent purposes of affording pecuniary,
 "' medical, and other relief to such natives of England and
 "' Wales, and their descendants, as may from sickness and
 "' other causes have fallen into distress.' A benevolent
 "society can have no more right to interfere with the
 "political opinions of its members, or with their course as
 "citizens, than has a church, a literary society, or a joint-
 "stock company. Whether the hand which holds out
 "assistance and the lips which breathe comfort are politi-
 "cally orthodox or not, the distressed English emigrant
 "whose relief is the paramount duty of this Society, will
 "never enquire.

"I should always be ready to do or forego anything in
 "the interest of charity, provided there were no impeach-
 "ment of my character or violation of any public principle
 "in my person. But with a view to the possibility of
 "any further proceedings of this kind, I must say dis-
 "tinctly that I will not suffer the St. George's Society,
 "on the pretence of my being one of its members, to inter-
 "fere with my political convictions or with my conduct as
 "a citizen. If an attempt is ever made to remove me
 "from my Life Membership, or to inflict upon me a stigma
 "or penalty of any kind on account of my political
 "opinions, I shall seek the protection of the law and shall
 "endeavour with its aid to preserve a benevolent institu-
 "tion from being perverted, with its fund, to the ends of
 "political party and used for party purposes as an engine
 "of social persecution. I shall do this in the interest of
 "public charity much more than in my own interest,
 "though I have freely contributed to the benevolent fund.

“ Years ago, seeing, as I thought, that influences different
 “ from those of benevolence or of English brotherhood
 “ were gaining a footing in the Society, I retired from
 “ active membership, only leaving my name as a Life
 “ Member on the books to avoid the scandal of secession,
 “ and sought other organs for the charitable effort which
 “ had been my object in joining the Association.

“ I am, sir,

“ Your obedient servant,

(Signed) “ GOLDWIN SMITH.

“ Washington, March 6, 1893.”

I afterwards allowed six months to elapse in order to give Mr. Castell Hopkins and his party time, if they dared, to renew their attack, of which there were some mutterings. I then, being on the eve of departure to England, and thinking that advantage might again be taken of my absence to attack my character, addressed the following letter of resignation to the Secretary of the Society :—

“ THE GRANGE,

“ TORONTO, 20th September, 1893.

“ *To the Secretary St. George's Society, Toronto :—*

“ DEAR SIR,—I am shortly leaving for England, and,
 “ before my departure, I think it best formally to retire
 “ from my Life Membership of the St. George's Society
 “ of Toronto. Some years ago, having reason to appre-
 “ hend that political animosities, of which I was an ob-
 “ ject, had found their way into your branch of the St.
 “ George's Society, I practically withdrew and was re-
 “ ceived into another branch. I did this with reluctance
 “ as an Englishman, who had always cherished English
 “ ties and associations, and not least my connection with
 “ the St. George's Society of Toronto. Not wishing to

“ create any unpleasant impression, I abstained from the
 “ formal withdrawal of my name. But, as you are aware,
 “ I from that time ceased to take any part in the proceed-
 “ ings of the Society.

“ In March last political enemies, who had long been
 “ assailing my character in other ways, took advantage
 “ during my absence from the country, of the retention of
 “ my name upon your list to attempt the infliction upon
 “ me of the social brand and insult of expulsion. This I
 “ felt bound in the interests of society at large, and of
 “ charitable institutions as well as in that of my own char-
 “ acter to resist. Had I been approached in a way not
 “ injurious to my self-respect and reputation, on behalf of
 “ the charity, and by members qualified to represent its
 “ interests, there would have been no difficulty in obtain-
 “ ing my resignation.

“ More than six months having now elapsed since the
 “ attack on me was made without any intimation of its re-
 “ newal, I feel that I shall be liable to no misconstruction
 “ in giving effect to my original inclination. I beg leave
 “ accordingly to resign my Life Membership and withdraw
 “ from your Society.

“ I am,

“ Dear Sir,

“ Yours faithfully,

(Signed) “ GOLDWIN SMITH.”

Mr. Castell Hopkins now has the assurance to charge me with having abused my membership in the St. George's Society for political purposes. This statement is absolutely false. Nobody ever accused me, or, I believe, thought of accusing me, of anything of the kind. If there had been the slightest ground for the charge Mr. Castell Hopkins would have embodied it in his motion, or brought it forward at the time.

I have mentioned that the *Empire*, the journal of the editorial staff of which Mr. Castell Hopkins was a member, had attempted to fix upon me the charge of treason. The circumstances were these:—

Sir John Macdonald, being advised that his fiscal policy was growing unpopular, determined at once to dissolve Parliament and snap a verdict. The Parliament had still a year to run and the Government had a large and mechanical majority. There was no pretext for dissolution. To justify it, Sir John Macdonald declared to the country that negotiations for a reciprocity treaty were on foot with the United States, and that he wanted a popular mandate. The American Secretary of State, Mr. Blaine, at once wrote a letter saying that no negotiations whatever were on foot. There was nothing for it then but to appeal to the loyalty and “old flag” sentiment, and try to make the people believe that the Liberal leaders were engaged in a plot to hand over Canada to the United States. It is needless to say that this was a pure and most shameless figment; but some means of lending it a colour of probability had to be devised.

Mr. Edward Farrer was a journalist who, in the practice of his profession, like some of his confrères, had formed connections on both sides of the line. He undertook to help in preparing for an American correspondent a sort of brief, setting forth the American case, commercial and general, on the Fisheries Question, which was then in dispute. The document was printed at Toronto, in the office of Messrs. Hunter & Rose, for the convenience of revision by Mr. Farrer. Such was Mr. Farrer’s account. I had nothing to do with the paper; I had never seen it or heard of it; nor had I myself written a word upon the

question. The proof sheets of Mr. Farrer's pamphlet were stolen from the office of Messrs. Hunter & Rose by a printer in their employment, who laid his hands at the same time upon some other documents, and were put into the hands of Sir John Macdonald, who had come to Toronto to open the campaign. That morning word was sent me that it was intended to arrest Mr. Farrer and myself for treason. I of course laughed at the intimation. In the evening Sir John filled his speech with references to Mr. Farrer's pamphlet, on which he dilated as evidence of a conspiracy on the part of the Liberal leaders to betray Canada to the United States. He at the same time alluded to something else of a treasonable character, which had been discovered, and was in the hands of the police. Some days afterwards the meaning of his allusion appeared. The *Empire*, which was his personal organ, published an editorial with flaring typography announcing that the treason was spreading, and that I was involved in it. The proof tendered of this was a document alleged, like Mr. Farrer's proof sheets, to have been stolen by the Tory spy from the office of Messrs. Hunter & Rose. It purported to be an instruction from me to my printer to set up a pamphlet of my own, uniformly with that of Mr. Farrer, of whose treasonable production I was thus supposed to be criminally cognizant. Some time having elapsed since the printing of my pamphlet, it was likely that my instructions to my printer would have been thrown away. Thrown away they had been. But by a lucky chance they were recovered from a heap of waste paper in my yard, and I was enabled to show that they directed my pamphlet to be set up uniformly, not with Mr. Farrer's pamphlet, but with a former pamphlet of my

own. Of Mr. Farrer's pamphlet, I repeat, I had never heard. I placed the genuine document in the hands of my solicitors for the inspection of the editor of the *Empire*, who saw it and did not venture to dispute its authenticity.

The spy who had stolen Mr. Farrer's proof sheets from Messrs. Hunter & Rose, and had stolen and falsified my instructions to my printer, was rewarded by the Minister of Justice with a place in that Department.
